

CHICAGO TRIBUNE
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DANCE REVIEW The Chicago Dancing Festival ***

GLORIOUS CHICAGO DANCING FESTIVAL WRAPS UP SUCCESSFUL WEEK SATURDAY*

By SID SMITH
Special to the Tribune

This year's installment of the Chicago Dancing Festival concludes Saturday with what promises to be a jubilant bang.

Works on tap for the free performance at Jay Pritzker Pavilion include a rare Chicago visit by the Houston Ballet (in a classic by William Forsythe), the breathless pas de deux from "Le Corsaire" by dancers with American Ballet Theatre, and the Chicago debut of an all-male spoof troupe called Les Ballets Grandiva in the irresistibly titled "Star Spangled Ballerina."

Still, Saturday's menu will be hard-pressed to top the splendor and depth of Thursday's program at the Harris Theater. Though consisting of only six works, the roster offered a remarkable tour of major choreographers of the past 50 years, leading right up to our own time: Jerome Robbins, Jose Limón, Forsythe, Nacho Duato, Christopher Wheeldon and Lar Lubovitch.

Sure, there was no George Balanchine, Martha Graham, Paul Taylor or Twyla Tharp. But the engaging lineup-- featuring a wealth of dancers from companies all over the U.S. -- played as a performance seminar on modern choreography.

Better yet, it offered up performances so wondrous that it was as much a dancer festival as a choreographic one. At the top was an all-too-rare look at the New York City Ballet great Wendy Whelan in Wheeldon's "After the Rain," a duet he created for her. Quirky, sinewy, enigmatically compelling, Whelan, now in her 40s, glories here in a strange, offbeat piece that telegraphs her sharp, Cubist talents, her odd but seductive presence and her gutsy redefinition of what is meant by ballet beauty. Superbly partnered by NYCB's Sebastien Marcovici, she gave a performance never to be forgotten.

Kudos galore, too, to Penny Saunders and Terence Marling's silky, sensual teamwork in Hubbard Street Dance Chicago's "Gnawa"; Katherine Eberle and Sam Chittenden of the Aspen Santa Fe Ballet in Forsythe's spiky, gnarled twists on classic technique in "Slingerland"; Luna Negra Dance Theater's flowing, expressive ensemble in Limón's "There Is a Time;" all three couples in the Joffrey Ballet's lustrous "In the Night"; and the effervescent trio in Lubovitch's "Little Rhapsodies" -- a showcase for flashy, artful Jonathan E. Alsberry, coyly acrobatic Attila Joey Csiki and silky Jay Franke, the fest's co-founder, relishing a well-deserved moment in the spotlight.

When: 7:30 p.m. Saturday

Where: Jay Pritzker Pavilion in Millennium Park

Tickets: Free; chicagodancingfestival.com

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